Title: **Interfaith dialogue and faith-based social activism in a State of emergency: laïcité and the crisis of religion in France**

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Running title: **Laïcité and Faith in French dialogue initiatives and social activism.**

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Abstract: A significant body of literature demonstrates that the discourse of *laïcité* has become steadily more politicised in recent years (Gidley, Hajjar et al. 2016, 2017). This has led to the *omerta* around Islamophobia in the French political sphere. Instead a series of discursive constructs have come to be coupled with the normative rulings of secularism (Kahn 2007). Based on eighteen months (October 2015 — May 2017) of ethnographic research in the tense context of Parisian civil society due to austerity and insecurity, this paper shows how interfaith initiatives and faith-based social action figure into a new landscape of state-enforced values under a state of emergency, where one religion in particular is under scrutiny. The primary argument is that while interfaith education and outreach are dialogical vectors for combating discrimination they are constrained by the discourse of *laïcité* and the implicit targeting of Muslims in the state of emergency (*état d'urgence*).

Seldom explicit, the approach of many of these interfaith *associations*[2] in terms of dialogue between religions, show a lack of critical space granted to *laïcité* and its epistemological correlation to anti-clericalism. By contrast, faith-based social action, and its inevitable multi-faith encounter, generates more personal understandings about discrimination. Therefore second, I suggest that it is through social action that the recognition of religious identity as a factor acting in favour of a shared secular-religious common good can come about.

Key Words: France, Religion, *Laïcité*, Organizations, Social Cohesion, Trust.

[2] *Associations* or *Asso'* are what might be known as charitable organisation in the UK. Civil society bodies that have paid membership.

***Interfaith dialogue and faith-based social activism in a State of emergency: laïcité and the crisis of religion in France***

Based on eighteen months of Paris-based participant observation (October 2015 — May 2017) in both grassroots interfaith initiatives and faith-based social action organisations, including interviews, participation in formal (conference, meeting, roundtables) and informal discussions, in what follows I examine the so-called crisis of insecurity and its relationship to religion in contemporary France.

The wake of the Paris massacres in 2015 left a deep societal malaise around the place of faith in France. Such an internal and ongoing situation can be set alongside a discussion about national values, particularly prominent since 9/11, and the place of Islam in French society. This backdrop is accompanied by an aggressive state secularism or *laïcité* that has increasingly come to be utilised to define a national ethos concerning faith in French society. However, the period since 2015 has also attested to a significant re-engagement at the level of faith-based civil society initiatives, that tend to be dialogical and educative, both to reach out to Other communities and learn about each other.

A significant body of literature demonstrates that the discourse of *laïcité* has steadily become more politicised in recent years (Gidley et al. 2017). This has led to the omission of (or *omerta* around) Islamophobia in the French political sphere (Hajjar 2016) in which a series of discriminatory discursive constructs have come to be coupled with normative rulings of secularism (Kahn 2007). Given this context and the tensions traversing contemporary Parisian civil society because of austerity and insecurity, this paper shows how interfaith initiatives and faith-based social action figure into this new landscape of state-enforced values under a state of emergency, where one religion in particular is under scrutiny. The primary argument here is that while interfaith education and outreach are dialogical vectors for combating discrimination they are constrained by the discourse of *laïcité* and the implicit targeting of Muslims in the state of emergency (*état d'urgence*).

Seldom explicit, the approach of many of these interfaith *associations*[3] in terms of dialogue between religions, show a lack of critical space granted to questioning *laïcité* and its contemporary correlation to anti-clericalism, discursively and epistemologically. By contrast, faith-based social action, in its inevitable multi-faith encounter, generates more personal understandings about discrimination. Therefore second, and proceeding from the primary argument, I suggest that it is through the dissemination of its social action that the recognition of religious identity as a factor for acting in favour of a shared secular-religious common good can come about. The paper demonstrates empirically the social utility of two faith-based social action organisations anchored in religious communities at a time of increased societal distrust in organised religion.

The faith-based social action organisation case studies for this paper revolve around the *Comité d'action sociale israélite de Paris (Israelite Social Action Committee for Paris, known as* CASIP) and *Secours Islamique France* (Islamic Relief France, known as SIF[4]). At CASIP interviews were mainly undertaken with female interlocutors who were professional charity workers and observant mothers of grown up children, many of these women were born in North Africa and live in most eastern Parisian districts such Nation and beyond in Vincennes and Nogent. At SIF, I conducted interviews with all levels of management, relating in particular to the distribution of food in greater Paris (*les maraudes)* and the refugee shelter (at SIF's Head Quarters in Massy). All but one of my interlocutors were men, all, with the exception of the volunteers, were fathers and first generation Maghrebis.

In order to address this French conundrum concerning the position of religion in society in the aftermath of 2015, this article is organised into three parts. The first part is an overview of the situation pertaining to society and faith in 2015 relating in particular to the discourse of *laïcité* and the impact of the state of emergency. The second traces the different directions in which interfaith civil society has been moving within this context, the importance of Muslims and Jews to the new interfaith landscape in France, and

[3] *Associations* or *Asso'* are what might be known as charitable organisation in the UK. Civil society bodies that have paid membership.
[4] SIF has been an autonomous body i.e. not a part of Islamic Relief (UK or US) since 2007.

connections between this sector and anti-racism movements. The third and final section discusses the tensions at play at CASIP and similar tensions at SIF, emphasising their social and relational dimension, and how this speaks to the issue of faith as a driver for social cohesion.

**France in 2015: Religion, the State of Emergency & *Laïcité***

At the end of the Algerian war of independence (1954-61), though never fully proven, a bomb, planted by the anti-independence Secret Army Organisation (*Organisation Armée Secrète*, OAS), went off on a train travelling from Strasbourg to Paris, killing 28 people. Since then 2015 has been the most bloody year for attacks committed against civilians. In one year, the nation witnessed the murders at Charlie Hebdo, the Kosher supermarket, the Bataclan, other cafés in Paris's tenth and eleventh districts, and Nice. These massacres, that deliberately targeted first groups of Parisian artists and Jewish shoppers, and then evening revellers and tourists, and the fact that the perpetrators were French and identified as Muslim, have left a further layer of societal anxiety around religion in the public sphere and its relationship to social cohesion. However, this anxiety cannot be understood without taking into account France's long, colonially inflected history with the notion of Islam. Further, it must be contextualised within an ongoing and aggressive state imposition of secularism or *laïcité* increasingly projected politically, as a civilisational value and a bulwark against European Islamisation (Trigano 2005).

On the Monday after the events of November 2015 that have become known in France simply as *le 13 novembre*, then President François Hollande and Prime Minister Emmanuel Valls proclaimed a state of emergency (*état d'urgence*) under the 3 April 1955 act, giving special powers (p*ouvoirs exceptionnel*) to the incumbent. The original act in 1955 itself was born out of a crisis situation during the Algerian war of independence, and it enabled the swift deployment of military squadrons onto the streets of Paris with immediate effect. The state of emergency has since been renewed three times and, with the victory of President Emmanuel Macron, much of its legislation has been enshrined into law. Though not universally popular, such measures were a decisive reaction from the top down, reinforcing

military presence notably around Jewish institutions, and extending military deployment to areas of high ethno-religious diversity and tourism, particularly in central Paris. However, in the wake of the November attacks, and as a consequence of state of emergency restrictions on collective movement in public spaces, political mobilisation and mobile demonstrations have became more and more forcefully contained. Politically-minded civil society, for example pro-refugee campaigners and environmentalists or the movement against the restructuring of French labour law, was horrified at what it saw as a growing curtailment of civil liberties. Though such civil society was able to successfully oppose a proposed law to strip French citizenship from dual nationals, its élan proved futile against the wider project to extend the state of emergency.

In a country where faith supposedly has no place in the political realm and statistical data on ethnicity and religion are unavailable, the state of emergency has enabled unparalleled police stop and search powers, overwhelmingly targeting Muslims (see the HRW report *France: abus commis dans le cadre de l'état d'urgence*, 2017[5] ) [France: abuses committed under the state of emergency]. In such a context, the question of religion and in particular discrimination towards religious minorities has been pegged against the equally vexed question, in France, of race. Thus, where in France minority populations had previously been primarily racially interpellated using ethno-national markers, since the arrival on the political scene of the *Front National* (FN), non-majority religion, and in particular Islam, has become the prime vector for the identification of northern and western Africans and their descendants in contemporary France (Hajjat and Mohammed 2016). Further reinforcing this, mainstream cultural production has tended to project a fantasy urban-periphery *banlieue* (often areas of great heterogeneity) as a uniformly Islamic space (Silverstein, forthcoming).

Islamophobia and Antisemitism have often been put into productive comparison in recent years fostering an historical sense of the impact of such institutionalised and main-stream discrimination (Considine 2016, Gidley & Renton 2017, Mehmood 2017). However while

[5] Human Rights Watch article: https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2016/02/03/france-abus-commis-dans-le-cadre-de-letat-durgence which cites in particular 36,000 stop and searches for six charges pressed on terror-related activity.

clearly similar in that it relates to a minority religion discrimination, in France, Islamophobia is unlike Antisemitism because it is not historically connected closely to the major anti-racism *millieu associatif* [charitable sector] such as SOS Racisme and MRAP (*mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples*) or LiCRA (*Ligue contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme*). In spite of the shift in contemporary discrimination from ethnic to faith-based interpellation, these important *associations* have had difficulty accepting that the notion of Islamophobia can be set alongside discrimination on racial or ethnic grounds (Mandel 2014:6). From this situation, which has filtered through to the political mainstream, somewhat of a paradox has emerged in which two forms of discrimination—Antisemitism and Islamophobia—which have semantic and historical parallels (see Mehmood 2017; Gidley & Renton 2017:3) are differentiated between, politically. Antisemitism is equated with racism yet Islamophobia is seen as something distinct.

No doubt influencing the growing discourse around Muslim incompatibility with western society (Byrd 2017) which perhaps underpins anti-racism campaigner ambiguity towards clearly identifying Islamophobia as racism (Ibid:106), the debate regarding *laïcité* over the last thirty years in France has predominately centred on Islam and the practices of observant Muslims. This debate connects not only with the trajectories of North Africans and their descendants as migrants and postcolonial groups in France but also to the supposed specific lack of a close fit between the secular French Republic and Islam. Yet normatively, secularism or *laïcité* serves as a legal rampart against religious intolerance. It is therefore through its legal mechanism that critical religious interpretation (exegesis) can take place within any given religion. Given this, *laïcité* should provide a safe space for religious reform and re-shaping of doctrine and organisation in line with a host society. However, in the decades since Algerian independence, religious reform, particularly of Islam has taken on a political hue, developing neither freely from the state nor organically among the multiple Muslim communities of France.

A recent but increasingly significant body of work shows how *laïcité* in France has become operationalised by the state in a manner that is discriminatory rather than allowing for freedom of expression (Hajjat and Mohamed 2016; Silverstein, forthcoming). The

reasoning of much of this scholarship holds that the notion of *laïcité* has been turned from legal norm into a political value since the first headscarf polemic of 1989 in a French school (see also Kahn 2007:33). Following on from this, such a form of discrimination has been integral to the process of the racialisation of Islam (for a US take on this read Considine 2017). That is, the reification of religion and ethnicity (broadly, Arab, but also Black, into Islamic), and the simultaneous denial of hatred towards Muslims (Islamophobia) as a 'proper' racism, notably because of increasing concern over that which has become nebulously termed 'Islamism'. In this view, which has emerged in particular since 9/11 (Bayoumi 2010), Muslims, and primarily Arab Muslims, are, de facto guilty of racism, and particularly anti-Jewish hatred[6] in addition to their perceived increasing religious exclusivism. They are therefore not deserving of state protection even as legal help appears to be at hand for anybody from any background to demand legal protection on account of ethnic, racial or religious based discrimination.

## Muslim and Jewish organisations under the spotlight: the salience of interfaith in a state of emergency

The questions relating to religion in society and in particular Islam are deeply polarising in present-day France. A sense of this can be gleaned at the WIP – Work in Progress – a restaurant/*café litéraire* in the Belleville area of the North Eastern twentieth district of Paris that offers a critical but caring space for local writers (from detective novel authors to esteemed social scientists), varying in horizons, backgrounds, and cultures, to present their work. In terms of those who participate, the WIP represents the diversity of the neighbourhood and in particular its North African Jewish and Muslim heritage. One Monday evening at the WIP in early December 2015, a former-journalist writer and WIP-regular, made the following irony-clad comments as a way of summing-up the political-media context in contemporary France: "if you're French then you're probably in one of two camps and in either one you're either paranoid or depressed or both. If you're an avid

[6] Georges Bensoussan on the radio programme 'Répliques', France Culture 10 October 2015 " "today, we are in the presence of another people within the French nation, that are making a certain number of democratic values that had hitherto carried us regress… there will be no integration until we get rid of this atavistic antisemitism, that is silenced, as if it were a secret… in these families, antisemitism is suckled with the milk of the mother"

reader of the (traditionalist, conservative magazine) *Valeurs Actuelles* then you probably believe that France is becoming an Islamist Communist Dystopia and if every morning you read (the online and liberal critical) *Mediapart* you probably believe that France has become a Neoliberal, Racist and Fascist Hell…" Neither of course is entirely precise while both have a kernel of truth and both relate to Islam and Islamophobia.

The WIP is a space for safe and informal dialogue, much of which is between Jews and Muslims. During my fieldwork in Paris, I focused on Muslim and Jewish organisations, groups, and spaces formal and informal both at a national level and a local level. The relevance of an emphasis on attempting to come close to the multiple communities that identify as Jewish or Muslim has been heightened by key political debates in France since 2015 concerning the notion of *diversité* — for example the question of differential access to employment (Valfort, Institut Montaigne 2015) — religious difference — relating to religious markers in an environment which does not acknowledge religious involvement in the public sphere — and belonging — in terms of the increasingly politicised notion of *laïcité which disenfranchises orthodoxy*. These questions of minority-existence are set against a semiotic and historical set of parallels between the discrimination against Jews and Muslims in France. Yet, both identification toward Judaism and Islam have long since formed, culturally and politically, a part of that which constitutes France. Most obviously, these two religious demographics are the largest settled and established in Europe (Mandel 2015: 1). Furthermore, both have deep-rooted connections to the two most painful episodes of France's recent past: Nazi collaboration and end of Empire anti-independence violence (Algeria in particular), giving them a very specific stake in French historiography. Thus each has an historical experience of legally enacted State prejudice at one time or another. To drill down further, it is through the large North African (Maghrebi) Jewish and Muslim diasporas—the largest 'intra' groups within French Jewish and Muslim communities (Everett 2017)—their inter-community relations and their relationships to the French State, that we find an important sign of the Republic's inclusive capacity, its relationship to the near past of the nation, and its attitude to minorities.

Maghrebi Jewish-Muslim trajectories of integration in France represent a long-standing and deep-seated set of similarities and differences that relate to the evolution of the French State since its imperial form in Algeria (Katz 2016). These can be traced through to certain attitudes today in the state's post-colonial form, concerning for example religious and racial discrimination and movements to address this. However, the CNCDH (National Human Rights Commission, CNCDH, *Conseil National de la Commission des Droits de l'Homme*) over the course of the period since 2001/2 has demonstrated that there has been a gradual degradation both in minority relations and among the majority population towards minorities. Racist acts, in general, and on average, are on the increase. The commission's first report that combined acts and attitudes relating to racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia (and contained police statistics) was published after 9/11 and during the summer that the FN reached the second round of Presidential in 2002. Fast forward a decade and we can see that between 2009-2012 the general level of intolerance had increased by ten points. Further bolstering this, a broad-scale qualitative/quantitative survey with in-depth interviews (Teinturier & Mercier, 2015) found that 23% of those surveyed had witnessed racist acts on the base of religion in 2015.

Demonstrating the level of anxiety around minority religious communities, on average respondents to the Teinturier & Mercier research over-estimated Jewish and Muslim demographics in France by 100% (Muslims) and 1000% (Jewish). 40% disagreed that Jews and Judaism had contributed positively to French culture and 60% saw anti-Semitic acts as at least partly the responsibility of Jews. In terms of anti-Semitic attitudes, Muslims as a stand alone group held more anti-Jewish stereotypes: 10% more Muslims than the national average believed anti-Semitic tropes, for example, in relation to disproportional Jewish power within France (to date no data exists on negative attitudes among Jews towards Muslims). However, Islamophobic attitudes were also striking, showing that 74% of those surveyed considered that the hijab/headscarf should not be allowed when mothers' accompany their children on extra-curricular outings. This context predated the attacks of 2015 but reinforced a sense that there exists a French majority view that minority religious communities are not integrated and that by tenuous corollary religion has nothing to offer social cohesion.

Faith-based civil society has not conformed to the idea that all religion offers is division. In addition to the unprecedented and theatrical violence, 2015 also attested to a significant civic response to the attacks, in particular within faith-based civil society notably through the medium of interfaith dialogue. Historically, interfaith in France has been largely a Christian-Jewish affair and post-colonial Muslim communities have tended to cooperate and dialogue with other faith-based actors under the auspices of intercultural initiatives. Downing has suggested that in order to mitigate against the implicit anti-clericalism of contemporary *laïcité*, interfaith initiatives that have involved Muslims have operated instead within the intercultural sphere for example in areas such as the education of postcolonial history (2016). However, progressively since 9/11 and then again since the murders of school children at the Jewish school Ozar HaTorah school in Toulouse in 2012, interfaith under that name has become visible to the public sphere in France, only somewhat subsumed by fears around Islamic extremism and perceived of as a way to perhaps mitigate against takfiri[7] violence.

A society-wide feeling of solidarity and concern followed the attacks of January 2015, manifesting itself through a demonstrable injection of civil goodwill, public and private money, notably in Paris and a widespread positive national projection into the idea of *vivre ensemble* (togetherness). In parallel, the notion of treating discrimination through intersectionality — seeing the valences of power through the confluence of the multiple points at which gender, race and religion meet, and how society relates to such categories — emerged in mainstream politics when then Prime Minister Manuel Valls's made a striking set of comments about "territorial, ethnic, and social Apartheid" between centre and periphery (20 January 2015). Valls seemed to be talking about the privilege of France's very centralised body politic and its unprivileged urban fringes. His speech drew particular attention to the enormous economic and cultural potential of French descendants of *emigrés* from the global south living greater Paris i.e. *la banlieue*. Thus, since 2015 the

[7] Ultra-violent groups that declare other groups of Muslims and non-Muslims apostates and by the same token unworthy of existence.

question of racial discrimination, religious intolerance, and radicalism has formed an important top-down part of a strategy to encourage social inclusivity.

In light of this strategy and the national anxiety vis-à-vis religious and in particular Muslim identity often voiced through the discourse of *laïcité*, civil engagement with and through faith, in Paris and the greater Paris, has taken many forms. To summarise such efforts, with the contingent risk of over simplification, it is important to note that many have been initiatives that use the resources of a religious community i.e. a Church, Mosque or Synagogue and some of its human resources as a starting point. Work of this kind has most often endeavoured to reach out to other communities, particularly Muslim, or for Muslim communities, local non-Muslim groups, to learn about one another through encounter and education. While the majority of these initiatives inception pre-dated the January attacks, 2015 was the year in which they saw a significant increase in interest from all quarters. Furthermore, as Gidley and Renton have pointed out, while some state monies were channelled into dialogue initiatives between religious communities in 2015, far more, billions in fact, were put into counter-terrorism security programmes (2017: 3). This has meant that professional civil society bodies, whose funding opportunities had already become limited since the financial crisis in 2008 (Commission d'enquete parlémentaire 2014), have begun to target these funds by demonstrating their ability to 'outreach' to Muslim communities or promote dialogue.

Of particular note in relation to this 'new generation' of actors are the *associations* Coexister and *Parler en Paix* (Speak in Peace). The Belleville-based (but Paris-wide) organisation *Parler en Paix* for which membership increased fivefold in 2015, teaches back-to-back Hebrew and Arabic classes to a majority of Muslims and Jews. The premise of this *association* is of Jewish-Muslim commonality i.e. through the common conception that Semitic languages are from the same 'family'. By contrast, Coexister is national and has close connections to the French scout movement (and its Jewish and Muslim declensions). It teaches young people about Abrahamic religious practice and values and was established after the Ozar HaTorah school murders Toulouse in 2012 and, somewhat inevitably, was pushed to the forefront of the French charitable sector in 2015. The organisation tapped in

to political efforts to improve social cohesion through inter-community understanding and as such won significant sums from the Presidential office and the private sector after January. Coexister delivers seminars and workshops at Universities and, increasingly, in secondary schools (where, in the latter case, permission is given) to explain, communicate on, and debate on faith and belief. The association specifically targets a younger audience, 35 years being the upper limit, and has a wealth of presenters, not all of whom have a particular faith identity, but where possible, for example in the case of explaining the tenets of Judaism, the organisation endeavours to transmit this knowledge via the medium of another faith i.e. Judaism is explained by a practicing Muslim, in order to break down stereotypes. Both of these initiatives, Coexister and Parler en Paix and *associations* similar to them, existed before 2015 yet they all increased in size and resources as a direct consequence of 2015.

After November's attacks, as the state encouraged French civil society and particularly the extremely broad and locally well connected nexus of *associations*, to centre their resources on security-conscious measures to 'de-radicalise' Muslims, so collective mobilisation empowering interfaith encounters left the limelight. This derived in part from the fact that November's attacks, unlike January's, weakened a shared sense of responsibility for the state of mind of young French men who committed these crimes. The indiscriminate nature of the November attacks was laid more squarely at the door of 'radical Islam'. Furthermore, the immediate necessity for security outweighed the need to channel energies into a societal togetherness. The French Council for the Muslim Cult (*Conseil Français de Culte Musulmane*, CFCM), a Muslim community body established under the Presidency of Nicholas Sarkozy in 2003 but not recognised throughout France by all Mosques, called for a 'Mosque Open Day' in January 2016. Of the very few Mosques to respond was La *Mosquée de la Fraternité* in rundown North Eastern *banlieue* Aubervilliers. But the mosque organising committee did so both because the mosque had been a target for a strong-arm police raid after the November attacks and because the Mosque was looking for good publicity in order to expand through re-location nearby. Nevertheless, in the sermon after *Moghrib* Islamic Friday afternoon prayers to which various non-Muslim groups were invited, the civic duties of Muslims was insisted upon:

"How should we respond to this situation? Muslims today must propose answers, must engage as citizens, must involve themselves in public debates, participate with their fellow citizens to talk about real problems, those preoccupations of all citizens here in France like unemployment, discrimination in the workplace and all the social problems that exist today."

Such spontaneous initiatives can be juxtaposed with other *associations*, and religious figures who were thrown in to the media spotlight such as the *Rabbin de la banlieue* Rabbi Serfaty whose organisation Friendship between Jews and Muslims' (A*micale Judéo-Musulmane de France*, AJ-MF), so he told me, strikes at the chore of France's problems. For Rabbi Serfaty, who fights antisemitism on-the-ground, it is the central problem of today's society. Like many voices in positions of political power, he believes that antisemitism is "an illness that leads to a nefarious disease known as Racism; it is the pandora's box that has induced" an insufferable "ethnicisation of France" (Klugman in Nicolaïdis et al 2004). According to this view, a firm stance on anti-Semitism is considered a yardstick for tolerance and thus is bound up with good democratic practice (see Teinturier et al. 2015). However the AJ-MF itself operates in a kind of ethno-religious reductivism. As Ethan Katz puts it "the association's very name implies that relationships between individuals considered in some manner "Jewish" and other considered in some manner "Muslim" must be understood as "Jewish-Muslim" relationships, facilitated by leaders of the respective communities, often in specifically religious communal spaces" (2015:317).

While there is clear simplification in both the victim-discourse of the Mosque and the reductivism of AJ-MF, dialogical and educative initiatives such as *Parler en Paix* and Coexister appear to be premised on the sturdier assumption that education as a tool of personal and intellectual emancipation which will inevitably detract from obscurantism. However, we can see two underlaying tensions to their efforts: historical and philosophical. The historical tension is particularly complex because of the sensitivity it evokes, in part because of the depth of French historical guilt concerning the Second World War French State deportation of thousands of Jews. Because of this, initiatives that seek to confront,

educate against, and work to halt anti-Semitism, not without undue justification when one considers that the safety of present-day French observant Jewish communities is at stake, are given the uttermost attention by the institutions of the French State. Consequently, a perception exists that an ostensibly disproportionate bias exists towards the importance afforded to the fight against anti-Semitism in anti-Racist and interfaith initiatives, which at times can be perceived to skew on the ground practice. For example, the good intentions of Rabbi Serfaty (AJ-MF) and the important work that he does to promote amicable interreligious relations between Jews and Muslims in peri-urban France may be hindered by the fact that Rabbi Serfaty considers that his initiative strikes at a core constitutive factor of "violent Jihadism": an intolerance garnered by the conflation of Middle Eastern geopolitics and nineteenth/twentieth century European Jew hatred.

While this may hold some truth in rhetorical terms, Serfaty's work, which consists of speaking to Muslims, most of whom, he would affirm, are of Arab culture and heritage, by presenting them with 'a Jew' i.e. himself, might imply to his interlocutors a presupposition that all North African Muslims (he himself is from Morocco) are by nature anti-Semitic. Further, concerns over contemporary anti-Zionist anti-Semitism cannot be disentangled from the territorial and demographic question of Israel-Palestine that these interfaith groups so often shy away from. For example the very conception of that which is taught at *Parler en Paix* belies a projection of the linguistic context in Israel-Palestine mapped on to a French Jewish and Muslim demographic.

The other tension is philosophical and relates to *laïcité*. Here the notion of *laïcité* which, according to its most significant genesis since 1789, in 1905 is supposed to stand for both religious equality and impartiality and the separation of state and church (the former having become overly important within society, at that time) has enabled the shut-down of discussion about Islamophobia from the very outset. The ongoing and vapid society-wide semantic debate about the term Islamophobia[8] for example has allowed for the emergence of a conflation of fearing Islamic religious zealotry and promoting *laïcité,* increasingly a

[8] There is much debate about the date at which the term was first used (see Allen 2010: 5-7)

political value that can be acted upon i.e. opposing people who usurp the public arena to make religious claims. In this context, initiatives such as *Parler en Paix* teach Hebrew and Arabic without discussing sacred text nor the imbricated stories of Judaism and Islam (both historically and linguistically), thus remaining 'intercultural' while *Coexister* takes pains to never underline the religion-based (Christian and Jewish) philosophical outlook that inspired their work. Thus, a 'sacred' or 'spiritual' dimension which is of potential benefit for the constitution of active citizenship and encouraging socially responsible behaviour is occluded for fear of being not-*laïque* (the adjective of *laïcité*). Religion therefore, is broken down into its 'analysable' semiotic and practiced elements (known as *le fait religieux*); demonstrating a supposed secular scientific abstraction from the lived experience of religious practice or belonging.

Since January 2015 [two] tendencies have emerged within civil society that go from the congenial to the suspicious. These tendencies now exist side by side though somewhat antipathetically imbued with multiple tensions. A well-meaning but potentially skewed importance towards combating antisemitism sits awkwardly alongside the reticence to name Islamophobia. This is the point at which the racialisation of religion and politicization of *laïcité* collide. The perceived injustice of such a situation fuels bad feeling between self-defining communities and drives an 'us and them' wedge between militant alternative and mainstream anti-racism civil societies. This tension is further exacerbated by the issue of money and the State's political ambiguity around faith and race. The example of Coexister is instructive as it bridges the gap between these two politically sensitive issues in France but by the admission of its own hierarchy the passage from *le vivre ensemble* to *le faire ensemble* (doing together) has been difficult for an organisation that was not built on social foundations. The kind of activism that 2015 spawned, whether relating to religion, secularism or a supposed Semitic family of languages, is wholly abstracted from the social underpinnings which often drive faith communities.

***Jewish & Muslim social action: promoting social cohesion and interreligious encounter discreetly***

My experiences and conversations from within two social action faith-based and community organisations concerning the way they function internally and operate with wider society suggest many of the same philosophical and historical tensions found within the interfaith sector permeate faith-based social action also. The following section will highlight some of these continuities, underlining how the newly politicised discourse of *laïcité*, seen as a bulwark against extremism within interfaith circles is particularly pronounced under economic duress i.e. when an economic downturn directly affects households.

***Social Action, austerity and everyday interreligious encounter at CASIP***

Within Parisian Jewish circles *le CASIP* is synonymous with social aid in the Jewish community. The Committee for Israelite Social Action in Paris (CASIP, *Comité d'action sociale israélite de Paris*) and the Jewish Committee for Social Action and Reconstruction (COJASOR, *Comité juif d'action sociale et de reconstruction*), known jointly as CASIP-COJASOR (for the purposes of this paper CASIP which is how the organisation is referred to colloquially) is a charitable foundation that came about from the 1990 fusion between the two. The organisation is anchored in the principles of what it calls French Republican Judaism: the director of social services told me that this means CASIP "helps people to be at once rooted in their community and in the national community and therefore to feel at ease as both a Jew and as a French citizen." CASIP was established in 1950s to help the North African Jewish community integrate socially, culturally and economically into French society while COJASOR was established after the Second World War for survivors of the holocaust and is aided by the American Joint Distribution Committee. In addition, COJASOR has historically provided services for Jewish refugees to settle in France and today continues to provide a 'specialised service for survivors of the Shoah and their children' (Vadnaï 2009). Both CASIP & COJASOR were coordinated by the Charitable committee for Israelite Parisians (CBIP, *Comité de Bienfaisance Israelite de Paris*) established under Napoleon at the turn of the nineteenth century when the Jewish Consistory (first national administrative structure for French Jewry) was put in place. CASIP-COJASOR headquarters since the turn of the millenium are in Belleville.

The organisation's location in Belleville stems from the neighbourhood's Tunisian Jewish community that settled there from the 1950s. Integration into French society for low skilled Tunisian Jews revolved around socio-economic factors and in particular the lack of social housing for those able to get work in central Paris. Belleville became a central area where such housing was built (Messika Hommes et Migrations 2015:144). However, given the neighbourhood's socio-ethnic diversity — North African Muslims are second most populous community, after Chinese — perceptions of Belleville from within CASIP today are fraught with angst about a perceived growing Muslim radicalization fuelled perhaps in particular by Media focus around the local Tablighi—aggressively proselytizing—*Mosquée Omar* (*Mesjid Omar Ibn Khattab*, also referred to as *la Mosquée Jean Pierre Timbaud*)[9], whose rector was dismissed and charged with harbouring people fighting for political Islam groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2013. There is a further, purportedly concomitant, general malaise around "trafficking" (contraband) and petty crime in Belleville. For example, various members of staff at CASIP have had jewellery snatched near to rue Pali-Kao where the offices are located. These perceptions and experiences feed in to the greater insecurity felt in the neighbourhood that has made necessary military protection for all Jewish community institutions visible in the local area.

Inspired by the Hebrew word *Tsedaka*, loosely translatable as justice and righteousness, present-day CASIP continues to serve its historical functions including kosher food stamps, loans for entrepreneurs, shelter, help for finding accommodation and financial aid for the elderly, particularly for healthcare. The directorate of social services insisted to me that, in particular since the fall out from the US sub-prime crisis, housing and the lack of stock in Paris, has once more become a cornerstone of CASIP's work with struggling members of the community. As a direct consequence of this experience CASIP is seeking to begin building stock once more in Paris. Thanks to its historical longevity (for more on this see the special issue of Hommes et Migrations 2015) CASIP is able to track social despair in the community. This is because, though the world of social work has a notoriously high level of staff turnover (in the public and charitable sectors) management retention is very high,

[9] For an insightful deepening of this mosque and its activity see Omar Benlala (2016)

giving the organisation an organic historical knowledge of families that have used its services for a number of years. Furthermore, CASIP has an archival centre and an in-house historian/archivist, whose job it is to discern broad socio-historical trends.

A variety of voices in the social service arm of CASIP clearly signaled the increase in demand for services in line with the economic reverberations of the US subprime crisis felt in France since 2010. The simultaneous increase in Jewish withdrawal from society (known as *le repli communautaire*, see Schnapper 2009) and the experience of austerity can be connected: the latter factor emphasising community insularity. Economic insecurity, the service as a whole has found, intensifies the insecurity felt from the threat of exogenous anti-Jewish violence. Furthermore, within CASIP it has become increasingly common for social workers at the foundation to be visited by observant Jewish constituents who have been directly, though unlawfully, referred to CASIP by national social services (*Sécurité Sociale* or *la Sécu*) for resources such as shelter, medical aid or financial aid for rent. CASIP social-workers indicated to me that it was at times the supposedly neutral public social services of the Republic, that are required to act in a strictly impartial manner towards all citizens of the state, that in light of austerity cuts, and in spite of the bilateral CASIP-*Sécurité Sociale* agreements in place, "send" Jewish people "to *their own* services". The upshot of this "economic discrimination" for those users, it was suggested to me, creates further distance from state services, one of the few instances where observant Jewish constituents meet people from outside of the community. This can be seen in parallel to a process of community enclaving that various social workers spoke to me about in relation to what they hear from users: "people say here (at CASIP) 'you know us better, you treat us better, you know about Jewish history, we can speak to you about... well, in the neighbourhood things are tough, there's anti-Semitism, these aren't things that we can speak to public social workers about or to the representative of the town hall, she just won't understand'."

The feeling seems to be that the attitudes of state social services (*la Sécu*) are predicated on an antisemitic trope of readily available (and plentiful) Jewish funds. Beyond the good/bad dichotomy of non-discrimination/discrimination, this is particularly troublesome on two

counts, firstly because the combination of French Republican citizenship and observant Jewish ethical conduct that CASIP seeks to promote is undermined by the acts of representatives of institutions of the state i.e. *la Sécu*. Secondly, the experience of this discrimination serves to reinforce the idea of community solidarity in the face of external antipathy increasing the likelihood that CASIP be viewed by its users as an extended family (something that was related to me as somewhat of a discursive double-edged sword in terms of receiving users and the excessive time they were granted). Discrimination by State social services towards Jewish members of the public is therefore immensely problematic and demonstrates State marginalisation of minority communities under the auspices that they are not *laïque* (secular). Concurrently, the personal implication in making judgements about peoples' right of state social workers undermines the supposed secular impartiality of *laïcité*.

While these experiences of discrimination amplify division, one striking aspect of CASIP's social services is that its user-facing workforce is predominantly non-Jewish. This, the head of social services explained, stems in part from the depreciation of social work within a Jewish milieu: "Jewish parents find difficulty in orienting their children towards a career in social services... there is a difficulty to make people understand that social work is interesting, its useful, we need it and it does involved study, a state diploma (*diplôme d'état*).". Community specificity of this kind can be coupled with the liberalisation of the charitable sector (and in particular the reform of social action in 2002) that appears to be having a direct impact on diversity within the organisation. Nevertheless, having a majority of non–Jewish staff is somewhat inadvertently beneficial to the central mission of promoting Jewish life alongside republican life. Multiple non-Jewish members of staff attested to the fact that this interaction creates dialogue, social relations, and improves mutual religious/cultural understandings.

The uncertainty of the present moment has focused minds at CASIP on posing questions about the shape of a Jewish future in France in spite of a certain withdrawal from local non-Jewish society due to security concerns, and a reification of Jew and Jewish community in public discourse. At CASIP this has meant re-evaluating the importance of social work (an

issue not only of course in Jewish households) and improving social interaction with society at large while continuing to provide a non ethno-religious alternative to French Jewish subjectivity. While CASIP cannot be equated with an anti-racism or an inter-faith *association*, its primary historical function has been to integrate or re-integrate refugees, victims of racial hatred and state discrimination — those deportees that made it back to France in the case of the Second World War — and aid and allow for the development of postcolonial Jewish groups — a majority of whom came from North Africa — in Paris. This historical experience has meant a progressive process of strengthening a Jewish community core for preservation and self-help. The parallel growth in Jewish orthodoxy (Schnapper et al. 2009), can be elided to some degree with feelings of stigmatisation and a progressive distancing of Jews from the French nation in relation to socio-economic issues. From within, CASIP and organised Jewish communities fear the very real possibility of targeted attack. This can often get bound up with a heightened sense of persecution, particularly in places Belleville, from local Muslim communities and mosques.

Despite the pressure of *laïcité* and the conflations made in its name, CASIP's mission to combine Judaism and French Republicanism is partly addressed internally. A majority non-Jewish CASIP social services staff body interacts with one another, with the state via *la Sécu,* and Jewish communities across greater Paris creating a space for dialogue and otherness. While first hand experiences testify to the ways in which austerity increases minority-majority power imbalance and discrimination, these experiences are often treated in unusual and inventive ways which attest to the usefulness of faith-based civil society actors such as CASIP in wider society. Additionally, by fusing religious values to those of good citizenship, in a context of political scepticism towards faith and social cohesion CASIP provides an invaluable message that transcends the limited understanding of laïcité and which cannot be demonstrated in the post-2015 interfaith scene.

### *Laïcité and intergenerational change at SIF*

At *Secours Islamique France* (Islamic Relief France, from hereon SIF) similar issues around discrimination and integration are set against a different context. A Non Governmental Organisation, like many Muslim humanitarian organisations, SIF came of age during the

conflict in the Balkans, growing greatly as a result of its social action in Bosnia. I conducted interviews with SIF concerning their initiatives in Paris that revolve around giving shelter (at their centres in St Denis and Massy) and food distribution: soup kitchens and *Maraudes Sociales* which are night time relief services for the poor, homeless, or temporarily sheltered that occur in particular during the harshest part of winter[10]. The SIF quarterly review describes its social policy as *héberger, nourrir, accueillir, soutenir* i.e. to house, feed and to support. At SIF, much like at CASIP, the professionalisation of the charitable sector has enforced a degree of internal diversity. The volunteers I met, identified as Muslim but during the *Maraudes* Muslims and non Muslims were given the same degree of attention. Much newer to the French civil society scene than CASIP, SIF represents a significant step in the direction of creating an Islamic civil society in France. While a great deal of SIF's activity is based overseas, they are increasing their French footprint also. In monetary terms SIF's budget at the beginning of the 2010 was almost exactly the same as CASIP, representing 27 million Euros.

Before meeting with actors at SIF I was told by several non-Muslim civil society actors that SIF are *communautariste* i.e. with an (exclusively) community-oriented modus operandi. However, when I enquired as to how SIF is any different to its namesake *Secours Catholique-Caritas France* (from hereon SC) — an important Catholic charity that works to appease poverty — the response hinged on the idea that the latter was fully secularised. However, spending time, variously in the SIF Headquarters, Massy (greater Paris, South West) and on the ground in North West greater Paris (Saint Denis) I found SIF — which is signatory of the Red Cross/Crescent code of conduct charter[11] — to have as much religious impartiality as SC. For example, at the top level both organisations hold council with organised religious community. For SC this is with the CEF (*Conseil des éveques de France*) which has oversight on important administrative elections/personnel, and for SIF this iswith the UOIF (Union des organisations Islamiques de France), a much looser, constellation of organisations engaged with by SIF President Rachid Lalou.

[10] The plan grand froid (big cold) is established by the Parisian mayoral authority in winter and indicates the degree of urgency with which people sleeping outside should be attended to in line with the weather forecast: http://www.paris.fr/services-et-infos-pratiques/social-et-solidarites/personnes-en-situation-de-precarite/le-plan-grand-froid-a-paris-coment-ca-marche-2986

[11] See charter in full here: http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/code-of-conduct/code-french.pdf

SIF held an extraordinarily important role in the harnessing of a Muslim identity as a positive civic attribute from the 1990s. In his book 'La question musulmane en France' (2015) Bernard Godard evokes the shift in the Islamic charitable field since the 2010s to a more diffuse social media based activism, represented notably by the more Salafi-inclined Baraka City. In other words, SIF by the mid 2000s had entered mainstream civil society and therefore has to juggle the French conundrum of *laïcité* and religious identity. Given the symbolic importance of the murders at *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 *Je suis Charlie* became a figurative receptacle for national sentiment and solidarity with the victims[12]. On the question of projecting inclusive values Mahieddine Khelladi, executive director of SIF, related to me that there had been intense discussions between the executive committee of social projects and the main body of staff (more than fifty in the Massy offices), at the reticence of some people to give a minute's silence to honour dead at Charlie Hebdo. Alongside SC, SIF stated in a written communiqué that it too was Charlie[13] and that Rachid Lalou had attended the march. Mr Khalladi told me that when a girl stood up and said that she firmly condemned the attacks but that she wasn't Charlie half of the attendance applauded. He expanded on this by telling me:

"When the younger team members started to leave the room I called them back and said "we have to speak about this". So we spoke frankly, a non-Muslim Spanish aid worker explained the importance of Charlie, that he had a Fascist uncle and that Charlie had been at the forefront of political satire against Franco and certain untenable positions of the Catholic church and the Right. Later on, another well-spoken girl said "I thought about the young people in Palestine that we never had a minute's silence for, or the hospital in Pakistan that was blown up by the Taliban. Why don't they get a minute's silence?" I said that there are many dimensions and one is religious: if your neighbour dies or if a distant family member dies far away who will you mourn most? The prophet said that the neighbour is so important that it is only because he doesn't share in your inheritance that

[12] The kosher supermarket much less so, even if the slogan 'Je suis Juif' (I am Jewish) and 'Je suis flic' (I am a cop) was seen and heard at the demonstration after the murders.
[13] For more details visit the SIF website https://www.secours-islamique.org/49-site/autres/720-je-suis-charlie.html (visited 2 February 2017)

he is not your family...The dead at Charlie are my neighbours, I'm not responsible for Pakistan or Gaza but we have a societal role in France, we cannot be outside of this collective suffering. The girl said that she wasn't Charlie but she would be because she understood what I had said and that she respected SIF."

Charlie created a fault-line between the organisation's old guard, most of whom are Algerian or Moroccan, having settled in France, for the most part since the 1970s who now hold important positions at SIF, and French Muslim descendants of Maghrebis and sub-Saharan African migrants to France who staff the NGO. Many of the latter group saw *Je suis Charlie* to be a refusal of minority recognition. The so-called satire of Charlie Hebdo an implicit attack stereotyping and orientalising Muslims in France. While feelings towards "Charlie" are beyond the scope of this article, suffice to say that these related in particular to the political co-optation of the march that followed the massacre and the question of Charlie Hebdo's insensitivity towards observant Muslims. For many, instead of satirising, Charlie Hebdo's editorial line preyed directly on politically weak Muslim communities in France. Representative of a certain anti-clerical tradition within the French elite, Charlie Hebdo refuses to see anti-Muslim discrimination as a noteworthy issue in France[14].

During the debate at SIF there was a realisation that an older generation mindset was no longer so prevalent. As younger Muslim volunteers at the refugee shelter and *Maraudes* that I attended informed me, young people are attracted to SIF in line with a sense of religious duty of *du'a* (good works) and not the Sufi-inspired aspiration to humanitarianism of both founders Rachid Lahlou and Mahieddine Khelladi. This fissure ties into the broader puzzle of proximity to the body politic for minority community members. Born in France, young French self-identifying Muslims have both a greater stake and a greater feeling of distance from the nation than people who settled there forty years previous, for whom integration was a necessity as opposed to something that one might rightfully assume. To mend this fissure the organisation's founders have seen themselves obliged to create a normative framework for the institution, a constitution of sorts (*cadre du travail*), which must be respected if the organisation is to survive. The aim of this, I was

[14] For more on who is Charlie? see the debate in the newspaper Le Monde between Todd and Meyer (2015)

informed, is for the framework to be extrapolated more broadly at the level of social relation so that the organisation can serve a broader educational function for its employees and supporters.

A shifting Islamic spirituality towards individualistic orthopraxy may relate to growing geopolitical religious entrenchment and perceived political alienation, but at the same time within SIF, NGO-sector professionalisation has brought about a religious diversification that creates spaces for dialogue and encounter. At SIF over the last decade and in particular since 2015 a space is emerging in which there is room to think about how to improve social relations between French Muslims and wider society but also intra-community intergenerational differences that can be quite stark, such as the case of Charlie Hebdo and its staunch *laïcité*. Like CASIP, such a space and the encounters it generates might be a more apt than those interfaith/anti-Racism initiatives that increased in size in 2015, to consider the causes for religious withdrawal from French society and concentrate on the social good that faith-based social action can engender.

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*Conclusion*

January and November 2015 signalled the emergence of two tendencies in civil society that highlight on the one hand an impetus to drive forward intercultural and interfaith conviviality both from the top-down and from the bottom-up exemplars of which are Coexister and *Parler en Paix*. On the other hand, mistrust towards faith communities and in particular Muslims has focused civil society resources on interfaith as anti-Radicalisation promoting AJ-MF and encouraging mosques such as *La Mosquée de la Fraternité* to open their doors and reach out to the general public. These two tendencies now exist concurrently though somewhat antipathetically, imbued as they are with the present-day tensions of *laïcité* towards faith—a sociological fait religieux not a lived experience and a natural part of citizenship—and the ambiguities of anti-racism movements towards Islamophobia. As we can see from the examples given from within the operations of faith-based social action organisations CASIP and SIF, religious identity does not have to be antithetical to republican citizenship because of *laïcité.* Further, the social responsibility

fostered by both organisations through religious values can even create durable bridges between religious communities, broader society, and state institutions, perhaps more so than organisations that have a dialogical function.

Today the philosophical underpinnings of *laïcité* are at a crossroads in France. Its supposed neutrality is simultaneously mistrusted and championed instead for political, often racially inclined motives. As we have seen, anti-Semitism and its relationship to Islamophobia relates to the juncture at which religion is racialised i.e. becomes politically mobilisable. The use of anti-Semitic feeling as a benchmark for democracy and compatibility with the values of the French Republic, which is what Rabbi Serfaty's AJ-MF expounds, is partially problematic as it creates a taboo, a shock-factor that it then becomes 'anti-establishment' to break. Equally, this imbalance can also be deployed to demonstrate that the state does not care about its Muslim citizens, or considers racism towards them as less important. The cumulative effect of this perception and the hyper-protectionism of observant Jewish space by the State in some quarters have, at times, served to reinforce the anti-Semitic trope of Jewish-elitist collusion. This is part of the reason why interfaith initiatives that seek to educate only about anti-Semitism such as AJ-MF are unlikely to ever fully succeed and at the same time part of the reason why socio-economically challenged Jewish households such as certain users at CASIP face discrimination from social state actors.

The hope going forwards is therefore that on the one hand today's crisis of faith leads to questions around Race and Faith in public life in France, in particular recasting *laïcité* as freedom of religious expression, both within communities and inter-societally. It is hard to see beyond the dark economic, historical and social tableau in Paris right now. Violence (both symbolic and real, state and non-state) and the insecurity it engenders has shut down informal political demonstration and put political activism in a permanent state of malaise. Nevertheless, the January 2015 effect of engagement and soul-searching continues to have an effect on the non-governmental political sphere. Jews and Muslims engaged as citizens within the charitable section are beginning to ask difficult questions about power differentials and civil responsibility at a time of intense scrutiny like what it is to be *Charlie*

at SIF. Such thinking may lead to individuals taking an active role in shaping an inclusive, dynamic and understanding but perhaps more humble future.

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